

Examining Experiences of Academic Advisors of Color Using a Critical Race Framework

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Part of a larger study exploring leadership development opportunities for academic advisors of color at a predominantly white institution, this paper focuses on the lived experiences of academic advisors of color. Through an understanding of race theory, a critical race lens is used to examine the predominantly white institution and the narratives of academic advisors of color in this racialized setting. This qualitative study explored advisors' experiences with the structure of academic advising, their racialized experiences, and how race is addressed in the workplace. Implications for institutions of higher education are discussed, including how an understanding of the experiences of academic advisors of color can aid in challenging dominant narratives and practices within institutions of higher education.

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Within higher education, conversations on diversity tend to overlook the importance of diverse faculty members, institutional personnel, and leadership, instead focusing mainly on student diversity (Espinosa et al., 2019). Diverse personnel become crucial in the effective management of institutions and in attracting diverse students. Understanding demographic differences between personnel and student populations has become critical in addressing the challenges facing higher education (Espinosa et al., 2019; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). Student and academic affairs professionals have provided a point of connection between students and the institution that has sought to educate students to become productive and informed citizens. Academic advising assists institutions in meeting educational goals by engaging students in the educational community, connecting students with diverse learning experiences, and focusing attention on their emerging and transferable skills (White & Schulenberg, 2012).

This work is part of a larger study on leadership development opportunities for academic advisors of color at a predominantly white institution (PWI; Spratley, 2021). Focus for this portion of the study was on the experiences of academic advisors of color at a PWI, with research guided by the following objectives:

1. Describing the racialized experiences of academic advisors of color at a PWI, and
2. Examining academic advisors of color's perceptions of representation within academic advising leadership.

Although the APA publication manual (American Psychological Association, 2020) called for the capitalization of proper nouns that designate racial and ethnic groups, we have chosen to not capitalize "white" while capitalizing "Black" like Stewart (2019) and the Associated Press (Daniszewski, 2020). Stewart (2019) explained that this capitalization process serves to decenter whiteness and center the perspectives and systemic conditions of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

Study participants worked at a large, predominantly white research university in the Southeast United States. Brown and Dancy (2010) explained that "the majority of these institutions may also be understood as historically White institutions in recognition of the binarism and exclusion supported by the United States prior to 1964" (p. 524). White culture at a PWI is presented as the norm, which serves to marginalize those not in the majority. As such, institutions must analyze institutional practices based in whiteness to develop strategic plans that create more inclusive learning environments (Bourke, 2016).

The University as a Racialized Site

Serving an important academic and social role for the university, academic advisors must operate within the racialized university setting. An exploration of the experiences of academic advisors of

color at a PWI must first acknowledge the university as a racialized site that furthers colonial logics and racial oppression and exclusion. Coloniality is a complex structure of management and control, forming the foundation of Western civilization and Eurocentrism (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Colonial logics refer to the logic of settler colonialism that served to elevate white knowledge and subordinate knowledge of indigenous peoples (Wynter, 2003). Wynter (2003) explained how the social construction of race provided the foundation to answer the question of what it is to be human and allowed the expanding West to define who was human. Subsequently, the social construction of race was used to “other” indigenous and enslaved peoples. The blocking of specific marginalized voices aids those in power in defining knowledge and humanness (Wynter, 2003). As such, academic advisors of color at the PWI are subjected to the university’s colonial logics of white domination and must work within this colonial structure.

Need for Race Theory

Effectively examining the experiences of academic advisors of color at a PWI requires an understanding of race theory and engagement with discourses of race. Race criticality “does not promote the notion that increased understanding bridges the racial gap; it asks the fundamental question regarding the systemic absence of clear understanding in the first place” (Leonardo, 2014, p. 250). Central to this study was an examination of how the racial project of the PWI perpetuates systematic processes of white dominance in the workplace for academic advisors of color. Engagement with race discourse provides a path to a critical understanding of race, racism, and the systems that continue racial stratification. Resistance to racism is often met with measures of power to maintain a racial order (Leonardo, 2014). Thus, race criticality must examine reality and personalize theory. Theory can help explain and examine reality because, “theory is a practical guide to understanding injustice historically, the needs of people, and where collective power lies within groups of people” (Love, 2019, p. 132). Race criticality requires understanding race theory as a relation, including the systems of power systemic within higher education.

The PWI as a Racial (Racist) Project

One way to navigate the context and systems that operate as the PWI is through the lens of

critical race theory (CRT) as it focuses on systems and is critical in its analysis and view of politics of these systems (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT posits that doing nothing against racism contributes to the systemic reproduction of racism (Leonardo, 2013). Racism is structural and built into social systems, thus CRT interrogates individual and institutional levels of racism while also speaking to questions of legitimacy and the right to matter. Through the struggle about voice and theory in CRT, it is understood that education is a racial project and, as such, a critical race lens can be used to examine the PWI and the lived experiences of academic advisors of color in this racialized setting (Leonardo, 2013).

Described as a crossroads, race is the meeting of social structure and cultural representation (Omi & Winant, 2014). At this crossroads are racial projects that are “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines” (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 125). The PWI is itself a racist project that has a long history of reproducing colonial and plantation logics along with exclusion and binarism. Omi and Winant (2014) posited that “the way we interpret our experience in racial terms shapes and reflects our relations to the institutions and organizations through which we are embedded in the social structure” (p. 126). As such, academic advisors of color must navigate their experiences within the racialized university setting while working within its confines. The racist project of the PWI reproduces structures of white domination based on racial identities and operates through interaction with other racist projects, systems, and a society of white dominance (Omi & Winant, 2014). The racist project of the university serves to determine who defines knowledge and who defines the values of the university. These determinations are made to reproduce systemic values of whiteness and perpetuate white supremacy.

Experiences of Faculty Members and Institutional Personnel of Color at Predominantly White Institutions

Literature on the experiences of faculty of color at PWIs provided insight into the role of race in employees’ professional roles within the university setting. Common themes experienced by faculty of color at PWIs included isolation; lack of mentoring opportunities; occupational

stress; institutional racism; the “token hire” misconception; and racial and ethnic bias in recruitment, hiring, tenure, and promotion processes (Aguirre, 2000; Turner & Myers, 2000). Steele (2018) explained the need to explore factors that inhibited the retention of personnel of color at PWIs including emphasizing intercultural competence and addressing supervisor biases, further studying campus climate to remedy workplace environment concerns of personnel of color, and building trust and support through open forums and safe spaces for personnel of color to provide constructive feedback on their work experiences.

Positionality

The CRT researcher holds a unique position; their experiences as a racialized subject influence the way they view events and participant perceptions (Chapman et al., 2019). Scholars of color seek to understand meaning within stories and honor community knowledge (Cook & Dixon, 2013). Leonardo (2014) discussed the Black-white binary of the United States and nonblack minorities occupying ambiguous places. The first author’s experiences as an immigrant and multi-racial person of color working as an academic advisor at a PWI have influenced her perspectives and shaped her experiences. Within the racialized university setting, she has been asked “What are you?”, had her hair touched without permission, and been asked which boxes to check for race/ethnicity designations. She cannot envision herself or any BIPOC in a leadership position within academic advising at her university.

The second author’s identity as a Latina faculty member at a PWI, who has also served as an academic advisor at various institutions, has afforded her a lens that centers lived experience as truth. As the only woman of color faculty member in her department, she is often the only person of color in meetings and often called on to respond to “all things diversity.” She is constantly mistaken for a student. She does not see people who look, sound, or think like her in leadership roles across her university and has had to actively search for siloed safe havens for BIPOC campus personnel because they are not easily accessible or present.

Methods

Within a qualitative approach, the larger study used phenomenology to explore and describe the meaning of the experiences of academic advisors of

color at a PWI (Spratley, 2021). Glesne (2016) explained that the purpose of qualitative research is to “seek to make sense of actions and narratives, and the ways in which they intersect” (p. 1). Phenomenological studies attend to the lived experiences of phenomenon and to their political, historical, and sociocultural contexts (Yin, 2016). This study used an interpretive approach to interview participants and report their experiences and the meaning made from these experiences. A CRT perspective was taken and principles of CRT—the importance of experiential knowledge and voice, the use of a transdisciplinary perspective to understand the context of experiences, and the need to cross epistemologies and connect with other disciplines to understand the complexities of race—were employed (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019). CRT was used to unpack participant narratives based on race, which provided researchers with the foundation to analyze participants’ experiences.

Data Collection

The study focused on BIPOC academic advisors rather than a specifically racialized group because of the lack of academic advisors of color at the institution and the need to preserve anonymity of respondents. Academic advisors who chose to participate in the study self-identified as BIPOC, worked at the PWI for at least 1 year, and advised undergraduate students. Participants were selected from different racialized groups and their experiences differed in part due to how they are racialized (Leonardo, 2014). Despite the unique experiences, common themes among differently racialized academic advisors of color were identified to connect individual experience with larger happenings at the racialized university site.

Five participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique that allowed for selecting specific instances that yielded information-rich data for the topic of study (see Table 1; Yin, 2016). Participants were recruited via an email distributed through a university-wide undergraduate academic advising distribution list and self-selected to participate in the study. Qualitative research places the researcher as the key instrument in data collection, using a self-developed instrument with open-ended questions (Creswell, 2013). As such, this study used one-on-one, hour long, semi-structured Zoom interviews with participants using an interview protocol. Open-ended interview questions gave participants more control of the discussion and elicited more detailed responses (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016).

Table 1. Self-identified Race and/or Ethnicity of Research Study Participants

Participant	Self-Identified Race and/or Ethnicity
Shawn	Black or African American
Henry	Black or African American
Gus	Black or African American
Maggie	Black or African American
Juliet	Asian

Using a critical race perspective and interpretive approach allowed the researcher to enter the interview with semi-structured questions and provided respondents the time and space to share their stories and experiences. The interview protocol that researchers developed was reviewed by faculty colleagues to ensure that questions were worded appropriately and would elicit thoughtful responses from participants.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcripts of participant interviews using a five-phased coding system that included compiling and sorting data, disassembling data into smaller pieces and coding, reassembling and recombining data into different themes, interpreting the reassembled data to create a narrative, and drawing conclusions for the study (Yin, 2016). Data were analyzed with the research question and research objectives guiding analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Open coding was used to organize the data collected. This was followed by axial coding, which allowed for initial identification of summaries and relevant passages in participant data (Miles et al., 2014). Once coding was completed, the transition from coding to categorizing occurred through synthesis of the qualitative data. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect anonymity, and all data were reported in aggregate form without identifying information.

The study employed multiple strategies to strengthen the trustworthiness of findings. Member checking was used for transcription review and allowed participants to judge the accuracy and credibility of the researchers' account (Creswell, 2007). Rich, thick description was used, which may allow for the transfer of findings to PWIs with similar contextual profiles. The interview protocol, recording of interviews, and specific coding procedures established dependability by documenting the research process and providing

information for potential study replication. The use of an audit trail, subjectivity statement, and reflexive journal contributed to the confirmability of this research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Racialized Interpersonal Experiences of Academic Advisors of Color

How people negotiate race is tied to their experience with both internal and external identification. Academic advisors in this study experienced their bodies being visually read and the summary judgments that followed, including a questioning of their legitimacy. Two participants were questioned about their academic advisor status several times. Shawn stated, "I think being a person of color, specifically being a Black man here, you know, sometimes you get asked questions about, are you an advisor?" Similarly, Henry offered:

The number of times that I've walked a student back to my office and they asked, like, oh, are you taking me to the advisor or are you my advisor? . . . I don't know how often my colleagues who maybe weren't Black got those same questions.

This racialization and questioning of legitimacy served to denigrate their credentials and subordinate them to the white majority. Per Fanon's (1952) concept of black skin, white masks, the academic advisor of color may have a credentialed position at the university but is still judged by the color of their skin. The foremost way that racialization occurs is through bodily appearance where the body is read to make summary judgments about race (Mills, 1998). The visual dimension of racialization works with concepts of race that are spread and widely accepted to reproduce white supremacy.

Academic advisors of color working at a PWI also experienced microaggressions from students, colleagues, and others in the university setting. Henry detailed multiple examples of racial microaggressions experienced in different contexts while working at the PWI, including inappropriate jokes during a meeting with campus colleagues. Although this microaggression was addressed by those in the room, because of the systemic privilege granted to whites at the PWI through control of thought processes and social structures, this white colleague was empowered to make an inappropriate joke. Henry detailed

another interaction where a coworker referred to him as “boy,” and despite the coworker’s intent, Henry had to explain the impact of the reference.

The racialized university site allows the reproduction of colonial and plantation logics where those deemed racially other—not white—are seen as less than human and relegated to a lower social category. This consequently impacts their interactions with everyone in the university setting, their navigating of their workplace and identity, and their well-being (Leonardo, 2014).

Academic advisors of color are oftentimes the only BIPOC present when participating in university meetings, suggesting a lack of representation within academic advising at the university. Gus stated:

If I go to a meeting, a lot of times I’m the only person of color in that meeting or there may be one other person of color . . . I may be the only male person of color in most of my meetings.

Workplace interactions within advising units and with other university constituents resulted in the reality that academic advisors of color were underrepresented at this university. Juliet stated, “When I started, I was the only person of color in my current office. I mean, even in my previous office I was the only person of color.” Leonardo (2013) explained that “the racial dimensions of daily, even mundane, exchanges become significant if we consider their compound effect of demoralizing and psychologically breaking down people of color in institutional settings” (p. 19).

The Structure of Academic Advising at the Predominantly White Institution

The structure of academic advising coupled with structural racism in the institution’s hierarchies caused underrepresentation of academic advisors of color in positions of advising leadership. Advising was decentralized across the institution’s different colleges and supervisors for academic advising staff were generally faculty members or dean-level faculty without advising experience. Juliet discussed pay disparities among academic advising colleagues, including feeling discriminated against when the previous advisor in her position and the advisor following her—neither of whom had a master’s degree like her—were hired at a higher salary. She stated:

Both of these academic advisors were not people of color. . . . I don’t think that the office who I was working for even realized that was happening. So, when I went to request a salary pay for you know, just because it’s equity, I was turned down for it.

Even if workplaces claim to be unaware of negative racialized experiences for employees of color, Juliet emphasized the importance of awareness of the treatment and experiences of employees of color. The underpayment of people of color in the workplace is a result of the organization of racial hierarchies in society as well as government policies and institutional practices that perpetuated employment discrimination and established racial disparities in wages (Solomon et al., 2019.) Because racism is an ordinary part of conducting business, it is institutionalized in the structure of higher education institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

All five participants noted that academic advisors of color were not represented in advising leadership positions at the PWI. Gus stated:

Within my office, but also based on my work with other departments and based on my work with other offices, I don’t encounter many persons of color in a leadership role. I think it has the most to do with the structure of leadership in terms of advising. Most directors of advising and most number one positions of leadership in relation to advising are faculty.

Shawn contrasted the lack of representation in academic advising to the more visible representation of people of color in other university functional areas, such as student affairs:

As a Black man here . . . being in an office where there’s not a person that looks like you in a supervisory position . . . or as your director, you know, that kind of, it can do something to you because you’re like, hey I don’t see no one in my position.

A lack of representation in positions of advising leadership was identified by each respondent and connected directly to the lack of a promotional structure for academic advising within the university. The institution’s reclassification of some advising positions into specific academic advising

job titles and duties aided in distinguishing academic advising as a profession within the university but not in fully defining academic advising for others in the university community. Furthermore, although some units were hiring more BIPOC academic advisors, a lack of promotional structure for academic advisors within these new job classifications led many advisors to leave the university or their units for increased pay and promotion. At the institution, many entry level student affairs positions began at the assistant director level. Academic advising positions began at advisor 1 and progressed to advisor 3, with few opportunities across the institution for promotion to assistant director. Although the duties within position descriptions are important, job titles signal an individual's level within an organization and serve as a symbolic representation of the value the individual brings to the organization (Knight, 2017).

Juliet questioned why academic advisors of color were not hired for leadership positions for which they were qualified. Juliet reflected, "It's a two-part question because one, are academic advisors even valued on our campus? And two, are academic advisors of color valued on our campus? I'm not confident in answering yes to either of those questions." A lack of representation was disappointing to participants and was directly related to the language and practices surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at the institution.

Addressing Race in the Workplace

The heightened awareness of racial injustice and systemic racism within the United States, particularly catalyzed by events like the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in summer 2020, brought these issues to the forefront for many. Consequently, participants were prompted to reflect on the language of diversity as observed both within their specific units and throughout the university community. Multiple advisors discussed the increase of language surrounding diversity because of current events. Yet, although the university had official diversity statements and claimed value of DEI, participants did not feel like those values had tangible returns. Gus commented:

Prior to the last 6 months, it really wasn't discussed tangibly. It really wasn't discussed in a non-abstract way... There wasn't an undercurrent of specifically addressing diversity and equity. It was just kind of this understood thing that I believe the college hoped that they were doing.

Before the spring and summer of 2020, advisors did not see a concerted effort within their units to discuss and tangibly address issues of DEI.

A similar pattern could be seen at the university level. Gus stated, "You just never saw the tangible returns on the values that everyone thought had existed."

When hiring academic advisors for their units, all candidates were asked about their experiences in supporting diversity and the importance of diversity, although advisors did not believe that candidates' answers to these questions were heavily weighted in the hiring process. Gus discussed the rubric used when hiring in his unit, notably the section devoted to diversity, but he felt the answers to these questions were not heavily weighted in the hiring decision. This denotes the institution's superficial support of diversity in the hiring process, yet fails to alter the thought process and institutional structure required to make change.

Maggie indicated that she had participated in academic advising hiring committees and that these committees followed institutional requirements for selecting candidates for interview and included BIPOC candidates. However, she did not believe this meant that a racially diverse candidate would get the job:

It's like the Rooney Rule in football. . . . You just have to have [people] there; doesn't mean you have to hire them. They're just following the Rooney Rule going, 'Look they're in the pool.' That's not saying that they're actually going to hire that person. They're just meeting that rule, so they don't get fined.

Although academic advising search committees included questions on diversity, these answers were not discussed widely in the hiring deliberation process nor were they weighted heavily in the hiring of new academic advisors.

Academic advisors of color at a PWI experience the university's racist project in microaggressions; the language and subsequent value surrounding DEI; hiring practices; and BIPOC representation in positions of leadership. Mills' (1998) concept of racial constructivism and the social construction of race "involves an actual agreement of some under conditions where the constraints are not epistemic (getting at the truth) but political (establishing and maintaining privilege)" (p. 48). These racial divisions are

socially drawn and affect all aspects of life, including institutional life in higher education. Through cursory attention to DEI in advising units and university conversations, hiring practices, and promotional practices, the PWI can continue its ideological and political work of white supremacy. Racialization has a social and cultural impact in shaping group identities and community formation patterns. Thus, the reproduction of white supremacy through colonial and plantation logics occurs in the university setting through strategic valuing of knowledge and ideals.

Discussion

Findings have direct implications for the work environment at the PWI as well as for institutional claims on DEI. The racialized experiences of academic advisors of color negatively impacted the workplace environment through microaggressions and a lack of representation of BIPOC academic advisors in leadership positions. Unmasking microaggressions as racist in their nature and not labeling them as nonracial phenomena is one step in addressing the racialized experiences of academic advisors of color at the PWI and provides a step toward tangible returns and accountability for these claims (Leonardo, 2013).

Participants discussed the increase in diversity conversation in the past year, but it remained to be seen if these conversations would become continued practice. If the current focus on diversity promotes a university image or ideal without full commitment, then conversations on DEI become a gimmick (Love, 2019). To prevent this, the university must explore whether the language of diversity is coming from whiteness or if BIPOC at the university have a voice that is heard. Current conversations on DEI at the PWI demonstrate the principle of interest convergence put forth by Bell (1980). In this sense, the conversations and increased commitment benefit academic advisors of color and align with the interests of the white majority and the university in putting forth an ideal image.

The framing of DEI and the language used to describe these issues is critical in understanding an institution's commitment to being equity minded. To truly implement successful higher education reform, institutions must recognize that whiteness produces and sustains racial inequity in higher education. A critical race consciousness is necessary to

create genuine equity and shift the framework of whiteness currently used in education reform (Ben-simon, 2018). A critical race consciousness can aid in the effective examination of how systems, policies, and practices in higher education are shaped by racism. This requires institutional leadership to champion and discuss DEI so that the value can be embedded within the institution and be supported by action. Lawton (2018) suggested that "in practice, redesigning academic advising so that equity is central requires institutions to pursue transformative change rather than piece-meal enhancements" (p. 35). Academic advisors must be empowered in institutional and advising decision making, including in the development of a shared definition of equity. A shared definition of equity can enable institutions to prioritize resources to meet the needs of students and institutional personnel. The university can work to create a shared definition of equity through focus groups with representation of all university functional areas.

With appropriate authority, academic advisors can lead the change and make decisions that directly impact their workplace environment, their role within the institution, and their work with students. By taking a critical view of how racism shapes higher education systems, policies, and practices, institutions can gather practitioners to have meaningful conversations that challenge the dominant racial narrative of the PWI. Empowering academic advisors means not only listening to their stories but providing opportunities for academic advisors of color to lead projects and initiatives at the institution. This does not mean that academic advisors of color should lead only race-based initiatives but initiatives that are critical to the institution meeting their academic advising and educational mission.

Although examining inequity requires conversations about the systems that perpetuate racism, a commitment to DEI means that institutions must do more to increase representation of academic advisors of color at the institution and within positions of leadership. Diversifying hiring of academic advisors requires that the institution and its academic advising units value diversity as essential and not optional to their mission. Making hiring a critical part of the scholarly excellence of the institution is the first step in hiring a more diverse body of academic advisors. Establishing hiring criteria that align with the institution's criteria for excellence and that are properly maintained can positively impact hiring and retention (Smith, 2011). The

institution must be willing to institute positive, equitable changes to its current hiring practices and approach diversifying hiring practices through a diversity hiring audit. Attention should be given to written position descriptions and intentionality in recruiting and advertising advising positions. A hiring rubric based on candidates' competency, skills, and abilities should be used for the applicant screening process to increase fairness in candidate reviews (James et al., 2024). Interview rubrics should ask standard, fair questions of all candidates, focused on behavior and application that assess knowledge and skill for the position. Evaluators should provide evidence within the candidate's application materials to support their scoring. Because the rubric provides a specific scoring mechanism for each criterion of the interview, scoring a candidate's record on DEI will be weighted the same as all other criteria listed on the rubric. During the debriefing process, search committees can use the rubric to discuss each candidate's strengths and weaknesses. In addition, the rubric may be used to develop a specific onboarding plan for the selected candidate (James et al., 2024). Implementing a comprehensive and consistent approach to hiring academic advisors allows the institution to diversify academic advising and provides equitable opportunities for academic advisors of color to be hired in positions of leadership.

Understanding how equity and diversity are framed, plus the language used to describe these topics, has proven vital in understanding an institution's commitment to being equity minded. To be equity minded, institutions must be critically color-conscious; be aware of who is included and excluded from decision making and policy creation that will impact minoritized groups; understand how inequalities might be created or worsened by inadequate knowledge or the refusal to give up control; and be aware of racialized identities, beliefs, and practices (Bensimon, 2018). Within institutions of higher education, there is a lack of understanding of how race and racism are expressed through language, curricular choices, or in ordinary institutional routines (Bensimon, 2018). Colleagues on the same campuses often have differing definitions of equity and a lack of a shared understanding of the contexts that shape the need to address equity (McNair et al., 2020). Effective examination of equity requires practitioners to understand how systems, policies, and practices in higher education have been shaped by racism (McNair et al., 2020). As such, equity work must

engage the entire campus community. Ahmed (2012) detailed the frustrations encountered with diversity work and outlined the apparent paradox between institutions' routine use of the language of diversity and the experience of practitioners with resistance by the institution to diversity becoming routine. Diversity aided in creating an illusion of equality because it fit with institutions' social mission of doing good (Ahmed, 2012).

Academic advising can be a catalyst for equity and closing the opportunity gap in higher education (Lawton, 2018). A culturally responsive approach to academic advising as teaching included establishing a career progression for professional academic advisors that valued continued learning and the application of culturally responsive teaching theories. It also provided ongoing professional development opportunities focused on culturally relevant pedagogy while providing the space and environment for advisors to explore equity at their own institutions (Lawton, 2018). To initiate an equity-minded approach to academic advising, institutions must show commitment to the value of academic advising and equity and match this commitment with resources and an institutional culture that supports reflection, innovation, and ownership (Lawton, 2018).

Limitations and Additional Research

The purposive sampling technique to select participants from one institution limited this study by restricting the transferability of the study to other types of institutions. The purposive sampling technique did allow for deliberate selection of instances that yielded information-rich data (Yin, 2016).

The findings for this paper are part of a larger study on the leadership development experiences of academic advisors of color at a PWI (Spratley, 2021). Understanding the racialized experiences of academic advisors of color provided the foundation upon which to explore their leadership development. Connecting lived experiences and leadership development opportunities served to better understand how academic advisors of color can be supported at their institutions. Future research should explore the intersectionality of advisor identities and how this intersectionality influences advisor experiences and leadership development.

Conclusion

An understanding of race theory is critical in examining the experiences of academic advisors

of color at a PWI, including an understanding of the ways that the racialized university setting reproduces systems of white supremacy. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explained that schools and schooling are undergirded by structural and institutional racism. For academic advisors of color at a PWI, structural and institutional racism influenced their experiences as they navigated interactions at the university. The voices of people of color are required for a complete analysis of the educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The purpose of using race theory to explore the experiences of academic advisors of color at a PWI is to translate theory to practice, to understand the experiences of academic advisors of color, and to challenge the racist project of the PWI. Christian (1987) posited that “when theory is not rooted in practice, it becomes prescriptive, exclusive, elitist” (p. 58). Theory must not be used to reproduce power but to challenge the narratives of dominant power and provide access and voice to those in the minority. Understanding the experiences of academic advisors of color can aid in challenging these dominant narratives and practices, while working to detach from the fictions about race that guide life and the systems people inhabit.

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